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SUBJECT: PM OFFICE BLAMES UNAMI STAFFER FOR BIASED HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Classified By: Classified by Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Maliki's staff has expressed concerns to post about what it characterizes as "inaccuracies and misrepresentations" in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) human rights report released April 24. UNAMI did not consult substantially with the GOI in advance on the report, as it had similarly failed to consult with the U.S. The PM's staff has accused one of the key drafters of the report of pro-Sunni bias and may expel him from the country. The report, at least for the time being, has damaged UNAMI's relationship with the GOI. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On April 26, Political Advisor to the Prime Minister George Bakoos recounted to poloffs an April 23 meeting between the Prime Minister's Office and UNAMI officials on the then-pending UN Human Rights Report on Iraq. The Prime Minister's Office objected to the report because of what Bakoos characterized as "inaccuracies and misrepresentations" of the situation in Iraq as well as UNAMI allegations that the GOI sought to hide the extent of casualties by failing to provide official figures. Bakoos said that, in addition to himself, present at the meeting with UNAMI were Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim, PM Foreign Relations Advisor Dhuha Al-Zubaidi; and from UNAMI, Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) Ashraf Qazi, Human Rights Officer

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Ivana Vuco, and Human Rights Officer Said Arikat.

¶3. (C) According to Bakoos, SRSG Qazi initially agreed in the meeting that the Iraqis could have one week to present rebuttal data, said Bakoos. However, recounted Bakoos, Said Arikat stepped in and said "No, the report will be released tomorrow." After this statement, SRSG Qazi changed his position. Bakoos recounted that the GOI team then reportedly asked Qazi "Who is the Ambassador for UNAMI, you or him". According to Bakoos, further discussion underscored that Arikat controlled the report release process, not Qazi or Vuco.

¶4. (C) Bakoos added that after the meeting, the Prime Minister's Office researched Said Arikat, who appeared to be able to overrule an SRSG. Bakoos told poloffs that they discovered that Said Arikat is a Palestinian, with many previous writings and interviews on Al-Jazeera that are critical of the United States and Iraq, and in which he repeatedly advances the premise that a new Iraq will ally with Israel against the Sunni Arab world. "How can such a person be involved with the UNAMI team?" asked Bakoos.

¶5. (C) Bakoos stated that PM Chief of Staff Tarek Abdullah is very concerned and that the GOI plans to declare Said Arikat a persona-non-grata. Furthermore, SRSG Qazi's credibility is damaged beyond repair, he posited. Poloff inquired if this would affect other aspects of the UNAMI engagement in Iraq.

Bakoos replied that no, each area of engagement is evaluated on its own merits, but a new SRSG is required and current feeling among the Prime Minister's advisors is that he/she should not be Muslim. Bakoos added that he was concerned the UNAMI Human Rights report content might agitate the Sunni representation within the Council of Representatives, and therefore escalate sectarian conflict. On the other hand, Bakoos noted that although the Council of Ministers had not yet discussed the report, he believed there would be consensus that the report is biased. He also said that the PM's office had not yet received any reactions from Arab neighbors on the topic.

16. (SBU) Bakoos informed PolOffs that Minister Wijdan plans to release a detailed response to UNAMI on either April 29 or April 30, and a press conference would follow.

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